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1913

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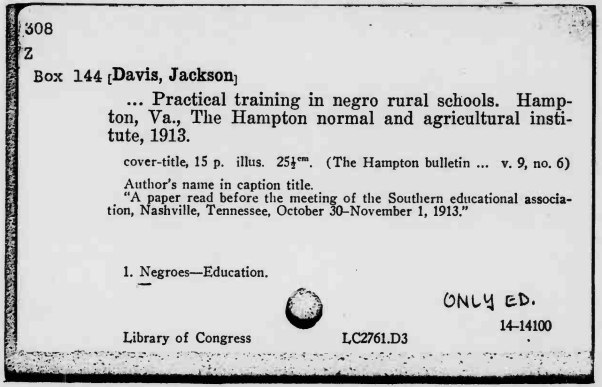

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PRACTICAL TRAINING IN NEGRO RURAL SCHOOLS

THE HAMPTON NORMAL AND AGRICULTURAL INSTITUTE

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PRACTICAL TRAINING IN NEGRO RURAL SCHOOLS*

BY JACKSON DAVIS

Supervisor of Rural Elementary Schools in Virginia

A few efforts had been made here and there throughout the South, notably by Hampton Institute in Gloucester County, Virginia, to tie up the work of the country school to the life of the home and the farm, but it was not until the establishment of the Jeanes Fund for Negro Rural Schools that a general effort was made in this direction. In Henrico County, Virginia, in the fall of 1903, following a conference of the school officials of the county with agents of the Jeanes Fund, a supervising industrial teacher was employed and put to work in all of the colored schools of the county. The pioneer work of Virginia Randolph in overcoming the indifference of her own people, organizing improvement leagues at each school, introducing simple forms of industrial work, and in the enlistment of the active interest of the white people in these efforts for improvement in practical ways, met with such success that a new spirit was soon ablaze in each colored community, and the schools were transformed in appearance and in the general character of their work. Other counties all over the South have taken up this work through the aid of the Jeanes Fund and pronounced it good.

The general plan, so successful in its early demonstration, has continued to grow and meet with approval. It has developed initiative among the colored rural people; and it has tied their interests together in the school for a better neighborhood. The moral effect has been noticed by the white people around them, and their support of this movement has been hearty. I asked a school trustee, in a county where this work and farm-demonstration work had been going on together for several years, if he could notice any change taking place among the colored people of the county. He replied that a decided improvement was going on, that they were working more industriously, and taking more interest in their homes, their farms, and their schools. They were so much interested in better schools that they contributed

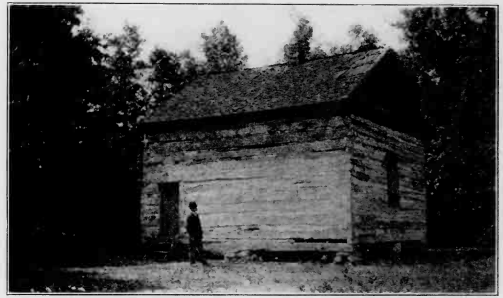
*A paper read before the meeting of the Southern Educational Association, Nashville, Tennessee, October 30—November 1, 1913

THE OLD HOME OF A NEGRO DEMONSTRATOR

from one-fourth to one-half the cost of new colored schoolhouses that had been built. He added that crime was decreasing and bank deposits increasing.

Supervising industrial teachers were employed in something like one hundred and thirty counties in the Southern states last session. This work has been made possible in most cases by the Jeanes Fund, but the counties, as they see the splendid results, are putting up more money from local funds for the support of the work, and in some counties the teacher's salary is paid entirely from local school funds. To give a concise idea of the definite improvements brought about by supervision and industrial training,

THIS NEGRO DEMONSTRATOR'S NEW HOME (ENTIRELY FREE FROM DEBT)
Note the old home in the rear.



THE OLD SCHOOLHOUSE AT FELDEN, PRINCE EDWARD COUNTY

I give the following summary of the work in Virginia:

For the session 1912-13, 23 supervising industrial teachers worked in the colored schools of 25 counties. Of the 591 Negro schools in these counties, 417 were visited regularly, and a total of 2853 visits were made by the 23 supervising industrial teachers. One hundred and eighty-nine schools extended the term an average of one month. Twenty new buildings were erected costing $23,808, and 15 buildings were enlarged at a cost of $2212.09. Forty-six buildings were painted and 81 whitewashed, and 102 sanitary outhouses were built. Three hundred and seventeen

THE NEW GRADED SCHOOL AT FELDEN

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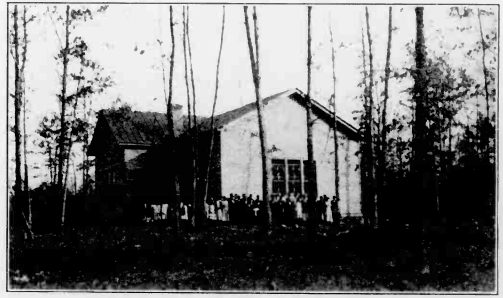

THE NEW GRADED SCHOOL AT FELDEN

"YOU DONE TURN' DE KIVERS DOWN AND WOKE US UP!"
—"*Uncle*" *Washington Baylor*

schools used individual drinking cups. The 428 improvement leagues raised in cash for new buildings, extending terms, equipment, and improvements, $22,655.80. This does not include labor or materials given. The whole cost of the salaries and expenses of the supervising teachers was less than $10,000.00, so that as a result of their efforts they have brought into the school funds of the state more than twice the amount expended. It is impossible to estimate the value of this supervision as expressed in the practical nature of the school work and the spirit of co-operation among all classes, which has been brought about in these counties.

PATRONS VISITING THE BRUNSWICK COUNTY EXHIBIT
Archdeacon Russell, Principal of St. Paul's School, stands at the left of center.

WELCOMING VISITORS ON PATRONS' DAY, ELIZABETH CITY COUNTY

Statistics I know are dull, but back of these figures there is to me a thrilling story of the efforts of people long neglected, now responding splendidly out of their limited means to build better schools for their children, to teach them to be industrious, honest, and useful citizens in the counties where they now live.

In sending out trained colored teachers to supervise the rural schools we are putting the best leadership of the Negro race to work in the task of bringing about better training, better farming, better living among the Negroes in the country districts. We must not forget that the old order is passing, and that the

PLAYING GAMES AT RECESS AT THE POLE ROAD SCHOOL, HENRICO

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contact between the best classes of the two races, as typified in the kindly relations with the faithful servants in the Southern home, is growing less. The colored people are steadily being segregated, and the danger is that the best white people will not know the best colored people. Large areas in almost every Southern county are occupied here and there by Negroes. They do not come in close contact with the whites, but are living more and more to themselves. It is our peculiar task, therefore, to see that these Negroes are given the right leadership in order that they may build up among themselves a wholesome and satisfying civilization.

The school is almost the only point where conscious effort is made by the white people to influence and develop the Negro race, and here is a great opportunity for constructive work, as indeed the supervising teachers are showing. In organizing the school improvement leagues they are bringing the older colored people together in the interest of better things, and are calling forth the spirit of self-help which is indispensable to their progress.

In the second place, the efforts of the colored people to help themselves are meeting with a more generous response from the school boards, and decent schoolhouses are replacing the neglected shanties that have done service for so many years. Thus in Virginia last year 41 colored rural graded schools received from the State Graded School Fund $6310.00 for maintenance; 24 of these, more than half, were built during the past year, so this movement has only just begun. No school is aided that is not properly lighted, heated, and ventilated, and provided with sanitary outhouses. To meet these requirements, in order to secure the graded schools, the Negroes have contributed generously. Most of the $22,655.00 which they raised went into the construction of these buildings.

For example, in one of the poorer counties of Virginia, which had had an industrial teacher for two years, the school leagues became aroused with the purpose of getting modern schoolhouses. I drove with the county superintendent in stormy weather over bad roads to five of these meetings in the different colored settlements of the county. One of these meetings was at a place called Dawn. The day was very stormy, but a large crowd gathered to meet us. The building here was an old one-room school, cut into two rooms by a partition. It could accommodate properly not more than 25 children, but the two teachers had an enrollment of 70, and there were 135 children in the neighborhood who ought to have been in school. The furniture consisted of crude, home-made benches, a few pictures, a battered and torn map, a case for materials, and a hornet's nest on the ceiling. The redeeming qualities of the school were cleanliness and the fine spirit of the teachers.

The people are now building a four-room schoolhouse, modern and sanitary, and they are paying fully three-fourths of its cost. The Negroes here are not rich, but they own their land and have a permanent interest in the neighborhood. Some gave trees which they took to the sawmill and had cut into the necessary lumber; some gave so many days' labor on the building, under the direction of the carpenter in charge; others contributed in cash. The local school board agrees to provide the necessary teachers when the building is finished, and the state will give to this school $200 a year for maintenance from the Graded School Fund. Truly a better day is breaking at Dawn!

At another meeting, where the school was maintained in a room rented from some secret order, we presented the needs to the colored people and told them we would provide another teacher if they would erect the schoolhouse. They readily accepted this proposition and each man told what he would do. As each spoke the turn came to old "Uncle" Washington Baylor, some eighty years of age, who arose with all the dignity of the older generation to which he belongs and, in his own peculiar words and manner, expressed his pleasure at living to see such a glad day for his people. He finally turned to the superintendent and said, "Mr. Washington, you has done turn' de kivers down and woke us up." The whole scene put me in mind of the thanksgiving of St. Simeon of old, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation."

Such scenes as this have become a common experience with me, as I have gone through the counties with the superintendents, after the industrial teachers have made the work of the schools practical and brought about the desire for definite improvement among the colored people.

The establishment of graded schools in this co-operative way in the heart of remote colored settlements will soon make possible a better supply of colored teachers. The plan which some counties in Mississippi and Louisiana are already trying, making such a central school a county training school for teachers, is one which offers immediate help in this emergency, and this plan is likely to spread.

To show the lack of training among the teachers of Negro rural schools, it will suffice to give a few figures from Virginia for the session of 1911–12. Of the 2083 colored teachers in country schools, only 15 per cent had had any professional training; 32 per cent held the third-grade or emergency certificate, which, as its name implies, is not a certificate at all but merely a permit to teach until a teacher with a certificate can be secured. The state spent that year on the latter class of untrained teachers, $71,165.34. Of course there are notable exceptions among them;

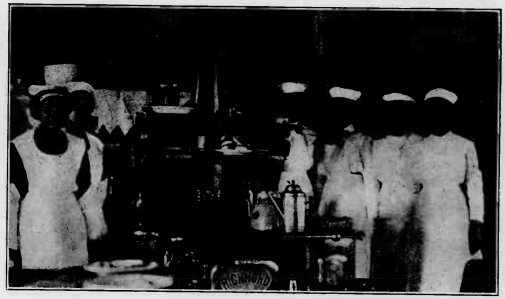
A ONE-ROOM NEGRO SCHOOLHOUSE WITH WORK-ROOM ATTACHED, CHARLES CITY COUNTY

some of them are good and are doing much to help their people, but it is unnecessary to add that a great deal of this money, if not actually wasted, brought the state a very small return.

One of the most promising developments in Negro education has been the co-operation of the supervising industrial teacher with the farm-demonstration agent, in working during the summer months with clubs of girls who make home gardens and can their vegetables and fruits for winter use. This feature of the work was begun in Virginia two years ago in four counties. During

THE JETER SCHOOL, HENRICO COUNTY

This school won the prize for the best woodwork at the exhibit. Note the window curtains and curved walk.



A COOKING CLASS AT THE HENRICO COUNTY INDUSTRIAL SCHOOL

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A SEWING LESSON IN THE OAK GROVE SCHOOL, BRUNSWICK COUNTY

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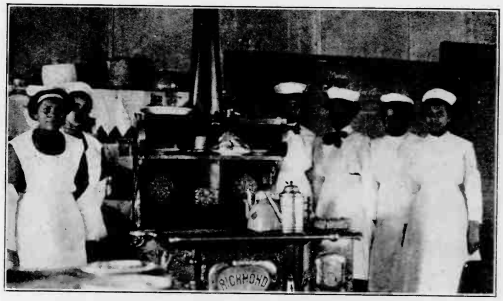

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A PRIZE GARDEN

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It is inspiring to visit these gardens and note the wonderful improvements which have been made ; to see the hope and encouragement on the faces of the girls when they have learned to do old work in a new way and found out that it pays ; and to notice

RUBY AND RUTH BANKS—PRIZE WINNERS FOR THE BEST KEPT GARDEN IN CAROLINE COUNTY

CAROLINE COUNTY GARDEN-CLUB MEMBERS

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I have seen splendid results of the cooking which some of these girls did at the end of their summer training. In one county the cooking club prepared a luncheon for the County Board

CHESTERFIELD CANNING CLUB EXHIBIT
This Club put up 1700 jars

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PART OF THE HENRICO COUNTY EXHIBIT

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I appeared before a county-school board last winter to ask for an appropriation to employ a supervising industrial teacher to do work, not only during the school term, but for canning and

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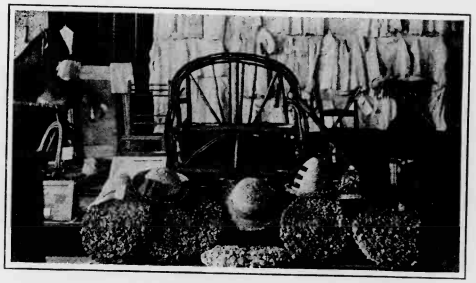

CHESTERFIELD COUNTY EXHIBIT

garden work, during the summer. I did not know what sort of an impression I would make or what prejudices I would encounter, but when I told of the canning work and how it meant better homes and better living among the colored people, one of the trustees said that he employed a large number of Negroes and that he was heartily in favor of this work and any other which would mean better living for them in their homes. He said he did not care to employ the kind of hands that live out of the country store on gingersnaps and sardines. He said that the men who had good homes and lived well, were worth infinitely more to him. The Board readily made the appropriation and the work has been introduced in that county.

In this connection, a country merchant stopped the white canning-club worker in one of our counties and said: "No, I do

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In this connection, a country merchant stopped the white canning-club worker in one of our counties and said: "No, I do

NORTHAMPTON COUNTY EXHIBIT

not want to buy any more canned goods. You have broken up my trade entirely. I still have on hand a lot of canned goods I got from the factory last year. I cannot even sell them to Negroes, for they tell me they have got a teacher and are learning to do this work themselves." If this could be the experience of all the country merchants, the South would be much better off, and so would the merchants, for if people do not have to buy canned goods they have more money with which to buy other things.

The industrial teacher literally goes about doing good, and her opportunity is as great as her ability. In the summer work they are touching directly the homes of the people and bringing about changes which are having a far-reaching effect for better living. I know of instances where whole families have been saved from tuberculosis by the faithful, persistent efforts of the teachers in showing the mother the necessary precautions for the prevention of infection when one member of the family had the disease. Most of the homes in which they work are whitewashed, and this has a wonderful effect both for sanitation and cleanliness. They are also teaching the people to screen against flies and mosquitoes, and they are gradually getting better stoves and utensils in their kitchens. As their wants increase, their labor must be steadier and more intelligent so that they can supply these wants.

I have observed that where the superintendents have employed supervising industrial teachers and made the Negro schools useful in their neighborhoods, prejudice is giving way to a spirit of kindly interest and co-operation between the two races; and invariably those counties that have the best Negro schools have also the best white schools.

General Armstrong, who founded Hampton Institute, recognized the value of labor as a force in building character, and in many ways he prepared the way for the general trend in education today away from the abstract to the real. Work may be simply drudgery, but it can be made intelligent, and it can be infused with ideals so that it becomes not only pleasant but a powerful moral force. Especially is this true of farm life. No one can doubt this who has visited Negro farmers who, by demonstration methods, are now making two and three times the crops with less labor than formerly on their land, and who, as a result of this increased prosperity, are putting permanent improvements upon their farms, building better homes, and taking part in every movement for the improvement of the neighborhood. Work that had formerly been drudgery, yielding the barest living, now affords them an opportunity for economic independence. It has become the avenue leading to spiritual and moral development. Those farmers who have been waked up to better farming have undergone really a spiritual change. They are more ready to help

each other. The spirit of co-operation has replaced the spirit of trying to prosper at the expense of one's neighbor. The change which must come over the South wherever this work has been started will bring new moral forces into play for the improvement of the life of all our people.

Negroes, either as tenants, owners, or laborers, cultivate farms in the South with an area of 100,000,000 acres. This is an area equal to four times that of the State of Virginia. Much of this land, as we know, is cultivated in the very poorest fashion. Much of it is waste and much of it has been worn out, so that it is below the level of profitable cultivation. We shall have a one-sided civilization as long as we have twentieth century methods in our cities, and eighteenth century methods on our farms. We cannot afford to neglect any class of our people, for neglect breeds ignorance, waste, and crime. Suppression is a policy that works both ways. If we deny the Negro the training which he needs to make a better citizen and a better man and a better farmer, we suppress our rural life and hold down our average to a lower level, and we continue to have him wear out the soil, which is our greatest natural wealth. Training of the right kind that will replace obsolete methods with intelligent methods, that will replace insanitary cabins with respectable homes, neglected shacks with attractive schoolhouses, a superstitious religion with an intelligent work for the coming of the Kingdom of God on earth—this is the rural civilization which some think must be wrought as by a miracle, but which nevertheless seems to be slowly evolving as a result of the new type of education which I have attempted to describe.

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